



PRESS RELEASE

At the White House Tribal Youth Forum, USDA Announces New Investments in Tribal Students and Higher Education

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WASHINGTON, Nov. 15, 2024 – U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Secretary Tom Vilsack today announced Tribal higher education opportunities and investments to train the next generation of agricultural professionals. During his remarks, Secretary Vilsack announced \$5 million in grants to support Tribal students at land-grant colleges and universities through the New Beginning for Tribal Students (NBTS) Program. These programs reflect USDA’s commitment to advance equity and remove barriers to service for Tribal Nations and encourage Tribal workforce development. Secretary Vilsack made the announcements at the 2024 White House Tribal Youth Forum during remarks ahead of roundtable youth discussions on food sovereignty. He also announced the opening day of the USDA 1994 Tribal Scholars Program, which offers a fast-track career path with USDA, and the Terra Preta do Indio Tribal Fellowship, which engages Tribal college faculty with USDA resources and research.

“These USDA investments reinforce our commitment to empowering Tribal Nations by cultivating tomorrow’s agriculture sector professionals and building a USDA workforce more representative of America,” said Secretary Vilsack. “It is important that USDA continues to uplift Tribal communities and provides pathways of representation by working with universities and colleges to improve the lives of Native American students and communities through higher education.”

The Tribal Scholars Program

The USDA 1994 Tribal Scholars Program provides full tuition, fees, books, and paid workforce training to any interested and eligible student pursuing degrees in agriculture, food, natural resource sciences, or related academic disciplines at a Tribal college or

university. The tuition coverage can follow the student from a two-year associate program at a Tribal college or university (TCU) to a four-year bachelor's degree program (at a TCU or another land-grant institution). When the student has completed the scholarship requirements, including a paid USDA internship, USDA may convert the student to a permanent USDA employee without further competition.

Eligible applicants include graduating high school seniors, full-time students currently enrolled at a 1994 land-grant Tribal college or university, or recent TCU associate degree graduates. Once accepted into the Tribal Scholars Program, scholarship recipients are eligible for year-over-year support until they graduate. The program timeframe begins Fall 2025 and the application deadline is January 31, 2025. Visit the [USDA 1994 Tribal Scholars Program](#) or email 1994@usda.gov for further information.

Terra Preta do Indio Tribal Fellowship Program

This fellowship program seeks to strengthen Tribal college and university research capacity and introduce TCU faculty and staff to USDA programs and services. The program seeks faculty and staff from Tribal high schools and Tribal colleges and universities, including positions focused on agriculture, food, and natural resource sciences. In Summer 2025, all the fellows will spend a week in Washington, D.C. to meet with USDA program leads, identify areas for collaboration, and learn more about USDA resources. During a second week, the science fellows are placed at a USDA research facility that aligns with their academic research interests. The research collaborations will take place with USDA's Agricultural Research Service. The program allows the fellows to return to their institution with new knowledge to benefit their community, enhance cooperative research opportunities, and advance their Tribal college land-grant mission of research, education, and extension. The application deadline is December 30, 2024. Learn more at USDA's [Tribal College Program](#) website.

New Beginning for Tribal Students Program

USDA also announced an investment of \$5 million to support Tribal students at land-grant colleges and universities on their path to higher education. This announcement is part of USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture's (NIFA) [New Beginning for Tribal Students](#) (NBTS) Program that supports land-grant colleges and universities. The NBTS grant program helps increase the retention and graduation rate of Tribal students attending 1994, 1862, and 1890 land-grant universities. The [15 funded awardees](#) are: Cankdeska Cikana Community College; Colorado State University; Montana State University; Oregon State University; Regents of the University of Idaho; Salish Kootenai College; South Dakota State

University; University of Alaska Fairbanks–Kuskokwim Campus; University of Alaska Fairbanks–Northwest Campus; University of Arkansas; University of Maine; University of Nevada Reno; University of Wyoming; and Utah State University (two awards).

USDA and Tribal Colleges and Universities

This year marks the 30th anniversary since Tribal colleges joined the land–grant college network through the Equity in Educational Land–Grant Status Act of 1994. This Act authorized Tribal colleges and universities to receive federal support and train future agricultural professionals. There are [36 federally recognized Tribal colleges and universities](#) that are designated as land–grant institutions. Collectively, they enroll more than 15,000 students and provide vital services to more than 120,000 Tribal community members annually. These institutions provide high school completion, job training, college preparatory courses, and adult basic education programs. They serve as community libraries and centers, Tribal archives, career and business centers, economic development centers, public meeting places, and elder and childcare centers. Tribal colleges offer the distinctive land–grant mix of research, education, and extension, while framing that education in the context of Native American history, Indigenous knowledge and traditions, and Tribal self–determination. Recently, the Department announced a [renewed partnership](#) with Tribal colleges and universities.

USDA touches the lives of all Americans each day in so many positive ways. Under the Biden–Harris Administration, USDA is transforming America’s food system with a greater focus on more resilient local and regional food production, fairer markets for all producers, ensuring access to safe, healthy and nutritious food in all communities, building new markets and streams of income for farmers and producers using climate–smart food and forestry practices, making historic investments in infrastructure and clean energy capabilities in rural America, and committing to equity across the Department by removing systemic barriers and building a workforce more representative of America. To learn more, visit www.usda.gov.

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CONTACT:

USDA Press

EMAIL:

press@usda.gov



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